

## ABSTRACT

Local community acceptance and participation is critical to the success of Payment for Environmental Services (PES) mechanisms in forestry management. Uganda has had some pilot PES projects, and is currently preparing to implement REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation) activities. PES and REDD+ projects are expected to pay participants who adopt land uses that support carbon sequestration and storage. Whereas PES predates REDD+, the two mechanisms are largely similar because of the payments to project participants. Any lessons learnt in PES are therefore important for the design and implementation of REDD+, especially in regard to how to achieve community acceptance and participation. This study therefore investigated the determinants of community participation in public and private PES forest projects in western and central regions of Uganda. In a cross-sectional comparative case study design with mixed methods, data was collected from registered members of forest user groups implementing PES projects (the participants) and non-members (the non-participants). Views were also collected about the outcomes of PES projects, the benefit distribution mechanisms, and the conditions that may compromise the success of such projects. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically while quantitative data was analyzed statistically. The findings show that local peoples' participation in PES projects is determined by a combination of individual, project-design and stakeholder relations contexts which vary within and between public and private projects. On PES outcomes, the projects are largely perceived as beneficial because of the opportunities for; alternative livelihoods, improved tenure rights, social networks, social services and increased forest cover. However, there are concerns about reduced access to forest products especially firewood in private forests, limited land for farming, increasing vermin animals and insufficient technical support. On benefit distribution, project participants preferred that cash benefits be distributed based on individual's effort, while non-participants preferred that non-cash benefits are distributed based on egalitarian or equal access. It was found that conditions that may compromise the success of projects include inadequate benefits, conflicting project goals, distrust and weak institutional capacity. The study argues and concludes that since community participation depends on the socio-ecological context in which the projects are implemented, future PES and REDD+ mechanisms must invest in identifying and addressing context specific conditions, needs and challenges that affect community participation. REDD+ promoters must also invest in provision of feasible alternative livelihood sources and relevant incentives in the short-term to attract initial and sustained participation. This will require genuine and inclusive community consultations, negotiations and flexibility among sub-national and national level stakeholders.